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The T-Group and academic achievement; an experimental investigation into the effect of T-Group counseling on College Underachievers.

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CHAPTER V

Summary and Discussion

Summary

This study was concerned with the differences between the effect of T-group counseling, task-oriented counseling, and no counseling on academic under-achievers.

The basic hypothesis of the study was:

Academic underachievers who have participated in T-group counseling will show a positive change in those personality dimensions which characterize the academic underachiever and in overall grade-point average when compared to either academic underachievers who have participated in task-oriented counseling or those who have participated in no counseling at all. From this basic hypothesis, fourteen specific null hypotheses were drawn. The null hypotheses were concerned with comparisons between the T-group, task-oriented group and control group on grade-point average and on six dimensions of personality which characterize the academic underachiever. These six dimensions of personality, abasement, affiliation, aggression, dependency, depression and ego-strength were synthesized from the available research which had examined the cause of academic underachievement.

It was theorized that a counseling method which could specifically deal with these personality dimensions would be effective in improving academic performance. It was further theorized that T-group counseling was conceivably such a method.

The population consisted of first and second year college students who were operationally defined as academic underachievers if they had scored at or above the 50th percentile on the College Qualification Tests, and had a cumulative grade-point average of less than 2.00 on a 4.00 grading scale.

Forty-five of the total population of forty-nine were used as the sample. The sample was equally and randomly divided into three groups; T-group, task-oriented group and control group.

The two experimental groups each received a total of fifteen hours of counseling while the control group received no counseling of any kind.

Both psychometric and behavioral criteria were employed in an attempt to determine the effectiveness of the experimental procedures.

Psychometric data were obtained for the entire sample through the administration of the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory and the Stern Activities Index.

Behavioral data were obtained for the entire sample from grade-point averages received at mid-term.

The statistical procedures employed, utilized the *t* test.

On the basis of this statistical analysis the following results were obtained:

Null hypotheses 1a. and 1b. (relating to abasement) were rejected. Subjects having had T-group counseling were found to have statistically significant more positive scores in this personality dimension as measured by the Stern Activities Index than either the task-oriented counseling group or the control. The task-oriented group did not differ significantly from the control group in their abasement scores.

Null hypotheses 2a. and 2b. (relating to affiliation) were accepted. The differences which did exist among the three groups were not significant at the .05 level of confidence and were attributed to the chance variation that may occur within common populations and not due to the effects of experimental treatment.

Null hypotheses 3a. and 3b. (relating to aggression) were rejected. T-group subjects obtained statistically significant more positive aggression scores on the Stern Activities Index than did either the task-oriented group or the control group. No statistically significant differences were noted between the task-oriented group and the control group.

Null hypotheses 4a. and 4b. (relating to dependency) were accepted. No differences at the .05 level of confidence could be found between the three groups with respect to this personality dimension. The chance variations which did occur could not be attributed to the different methods of counseling.

Null hypotheses 5a. and 5b. (relating to depression) were rejected. Subjects having received T-group counseling were found to have statistically significant more positive scores in this dimension of personality on the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory than did either the task-oriented counseling group or the control group. The task-oriented group showed only a slight statistical difference (at the .10 level of confidence) from the control group.

Null hypotheses 6a. and 6b. (relating to ego-strength) were rejected. Subjects in the T-group were found to have significantly more positive scores on the Stern Activities ego-diffidence scale than either the control group or the task-oriented group. Differences beyond the .05 level of confidence were not found between the task-oriented group and the control group.

Null hypotheses 7a. and 7b. (relating to grade-point average) were rejected and accepted respectively. Subjects in the T-group were found to have a significantly higher grade-point average than did the control group. No significant differences were found between the two counseling groups.

Discussion

An objective analysis of the results obtained in this study would indicate that T-group counseling does not offer a categorical solution to the perplexing problems of academic underachievement.

In the total interpretation and evaluation of this study several factors should receive consideration.

It is significant to note that the single personality dimension which showed the greatest positive deviation was the ego-strength score of the T-group. The author believes this finding is closely related to the positive deviation of the abasement score. Apparently an overall improvement in self-concept did occur in the T-group.

The absence of positive change in the personality dimensions of affiliation and dependency could have, in part, been due to the limited time factor. It may be theorized that the subjects in the T-group found both a source for affiliative contact and a focus for certain dependency needs in the group. The closeness of the group did not immediately act as an impetus toward independence and could have instead actually fostered dependent feelings. As the group matured, greater self-confidence would be expected to eventually lead to a lowering of needs for dependent affiliative relationships. It was obvious in the T-group that this was occurring, but not quickly enough to effect the psychometric criteria in the time allotted.

The lack of statistical differences between the T-group and the task-oriented group in the dimension of depression was interpreted as an indication that the variable of the treatment itself may have been a positive factor. The subjects in both groups may have simply responded to the attention they received, in contrast to the control group. They perhaps felt that "something" was being done and this in turn led to a kind of placebo effect.

The positive findings with respect to aggression supported an observation often made in T-group research. Several researchers cited in Chapters I and II had concluded that subjects in T-group counseling generally seem to develop a healthier acceptance of their feelings of aggression. In the present investigation, it was also noted that as a feeling of honesty and acceptance developed in the group, individuals were less reluctant to openly express

feelings of aggression or hostility. Open confrontation, involving other members of the group, was usually resolved in a single session and often left the subject with a greater awareness and acceptance of himself. Feelings of guilt about anger were worked out within the context of an nonjudgemental and understanding group.

In the final analysis, academic achievement or underachievement is measured, within the context of our present education value structure, by earned grade-point average. The value of T-group counseling, within this prevailing education system, must be ultimately measured by its success in improving the student's grades. Statistically significant improvement did occur in the T-group, but it also occurred in the task-oriented group to an equal degree. Perhaps the relevant variable here was counseling per se rather than any specific technique.

The placebo effect, mentioned with reference to the dimension of depression, may again be applicable in this case. The author is, however, inclined to believe that in this instance there are more complex factors operating.

For example, it may be that in a counseling situation which involves intense emotional feelings, and one which might bring to a level of awareness problems of personal emotional adjustment, the subject's academic achievement would even decline. It is also possible that during the course of counseling a subject might experience a decline in adjustment, or in his self-concept, just prior to showing improvement. Any decline in personal adjustment could conceivably be reflected in a lower grade-point average at mid-term. Even if improved personal adjustment led to subsequent academic improvement later in the term it might not be sufficient to off set the earlier poor showing. This of course would have the tendency to negatively affect the final grade-point average.

In the present study at least two subjects assigned to the T-group may have been adversely affected academically by this sudden awareness of deep-seated personal-emotional problems with which they were unable to immediately cope. In one instance a subject considered dropping out of college. Support from the group eventually turned this crisis into a positive learning experience and may well have resulted in considerable personal growth (as indicated by a relatively positive ego-strength score), however, any positive effect that this personal growth may have had on grade-point average could not be adequately measured immediately. In this specific case the short-term results of the counseling experience might probably be interpreted negatively.

Often the nature of the personal-emotional problems which arose during

the T-group were exceedingly complex. The T-group session would take on the character of a kind of psychotherapeutic situation. Viewed in this context the counseling situation assumed the primary goal of improved mental health with improved academic performance as a secondary aim. This lack of specificity with reference to academic achievement might result in effects difficult to measure in an objective pragmatic manner.

There are other factors which must also be considered in the interpretation and evaluation of this study.

Certainly one important consideration involves the amount of time devoted to the total counseling program. The necessity of economy and expediency in most educational institutions is a recognized reality. This was a prime consideration in accepting the fifteen hour maximum in the current experiment. Fifteen hours of counseling time per term is administratively reasonable, but if the prior assumption concerning the personality dynamics of underachievers is accepted, then it is perhaps overly optimistic to expect profound emotional changes to occur in this relatively short period.

Another consideration of a methodological nature which should be noted involves the sample itself. Although almost the total population was included in the sample no one was actually included without his permission. In this respect the subjects were in a sense volunteers, and perhaps by virtue of this were motivated toward higher academic achievement. It is also conceivable that a basic difference might exist between underachievers who are motivated to seek help and those who are not. At this point it is important to note that the personality dimensions which characterize college academic underachievers as described in Chapter I did not make a distinction between motivated and non-motivated students. If two separate populations exist, then the categories measured in this study may have been inappropriate to subjects who were sufficiently motivated to volunteer.

It should also be pointed out that the levels of aptitude or ability, as well as the degree of underachievement, varied considerably within the sample. Perhaps the operational definition of underachievers is not precise enough. It is conceivable that subjects who score at the 50th percentile are different from those who score at the 10th percentile. If this is true, then the homogeneity of the sample would obviously be affected. It may be that different approaches to group counseling are required for maximum effectiveness with different levels of ability or different levels of underachievement.

Another consideration of profound implications is that basic to the present research hypothesis was the underlying assumption that academic underachievement is somehow related to overall problems of personal adjustment. In general this assumption seemed to be supported. However some subjects

in the sample did not appear to have such problems of adjustment. If other reasons exist for academic underachievement, then a technique which focuses on alleged weaknesses in personal adjustment would be of questionable value. In defense of the rejection of the other theory, that academic underachievement is the result of poor study habits, it must also be noted that many of the subjects in the sample displayed an excellent comprehensive knowledge of study techniques.

Is it possible that a person without underlying personality problems, who has a working knowledge of study techniques, will still not achieve in our educational system? Perhaps it may be even somewhat presumptuous to assume that mental health can in any way be equated with our current educational values. Perhaps the growing sense of disillusionment with prevailing concepts and values in traditional education gives credulousness to the thought that it may be the system rather than the individual that requires examination. One might even be tempted to view this current study as one more thread of evidence indicating that enforced conformity to a pre-determined set of values is extraordinarily difficult to achieve. But then, do we really want to achieve it?

Overview

What then is the value of T-group counseling as indicated by this study? Can it be justified as a legitimate counseling technique in an educational setting?

The answers remain somewhat uncertain, and in the final analysis, perhaps it is the college underachiever who has been exposed to this method of counseling who should answer. These questions concerning the value of T-group counseling were put to the group in a post-session meeting, the subjects were asked to briefly write their feelings and comments about the experience. The appendix deals verbatim with these responses. The consensus of the group seemed to be that the total experience in T-group counseling was highly advantageous on a personal level. The precise nature of these benefits were less easily defined. Many expressed the feeling that only with a passage of time would the real meaning for them become clear. One subject felt that it was a turning point in his life. Some conveyed the opinion that they never really did understand what was actually happening, but that the experience made them see themselves in a way different from ever before. Several indicated a great sense of agitation in the early sessions which was slowly replaced by growing feelings of self-confidence. Finally, almost everyone expressed the